

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
KATHLEEN
BLISS

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THE LAST NUMBER of the News-Letter was taken up with an account of the reasons which had led to the decision taken by the Christian Frontier Council to bring it to an end. But though the News-Letter ceases, the Christian Frontier Council will continue its work under the guidance of Dr. A. R. Vidler. During the past year members of the Council have given generously of their time to organizing the business affairs of the News-Letter, and creating, in times of great economic difficulty which bear particularly heavily on small voluntary enterprises such as our own, a sound and stable business foundation. This unspectacular piece of Christian service has absorbed time and energy : but other tasks have not been neglected. Work has been done during the past years, quite apart from the Christian News-Letter, which is now bearing fruit, and the members of the Council hope to continue that work. The Council is holding a week-end meeting at the end of July to consider its future work, and will value the prayers of readers of the Christian News-Letter as it seeks in discussion and prayer the next steps ahead.

The Christian Frontier Council is, as most of our readers know, a small body of some thirty Christian laymen and women drawn from different walks of life and of different Church loyalties. The members meet monthly for a long

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By
MICHAEL FOSTER

evening, in the course of which they dine, say their prayers together and discuss some aspect of their main concern—the Christian in secular society. Visitors are usually present as well as members. The Council has always resisted the often repeated request that it should start a nation-wide Frontier Movement of laymen, on the ground that movements, unless they have a large field staff, tend to become lists of names on a card index and lose the vitality which belongs to small groups based on friendship.

An even stronger reason for not expanding on these lines has been the conviction that another task needed to be attempted. It is no longer true that the layman is a neglected factor in the Church—on every hand one hears it said that the layman must evangelize, that his witness to his faith in his daily work is more important than sermons, and from every central church committee goes up the cry, “We must get some laymen in”. More and more widely is it being said and sincerely meant that there is a vocation to be a layman, which is something more positive than the negative definition of the layman as one who is not ordained. But it is not generally realized that it is totally insufficient and may even be positively harmful to exhort the laity to obey God in daily work and in civic duty, and leave it in these general terms. Somebody has to make a sustained effort to find out what it means in concrete terms of day-to-day decision to take the vocation of a Christian layman seriously, if one is a doctor trying to do one’s duty by patients and State, or a civil servant, or trade unionist. This work must be done by laymen, who alone know the facts, yet without theological guidance and insight it is useless. To the task of trying to restate the vocation of the laity in terms of practical experience combined with theological insight, the Christian Frontier Council has given its efforts in past years. The work has been done largely in subsidiary groups called together from time to time or meeting regularly over a long period. It has only been possible to deal more or less adequately with a few of the many fields in which Christian lay vocation has to be worked out. No kind of claim to uniqueness, or to proprietary rights in the results of this work is

made. If they are taken up by others and given further content, the Frontier Council is only too glad.

THE FRONTIER IN THE UNIVERSITY

The main medium for working out the meaning of Christian vocation in the modern world has been through the pages of the Christian News-Letter, but this has never been thought of as the only means, and the preparation of books has been in hand for some time. The Frontier published its first book, *The Crisis in the University*,¹ in April. Its author, Sir Walter Moberly, who has a unique knowledge of the universities as Chairman of the University Grants Committee, has also been Chairman of the Christian Frontier Council since its inception. The book is based on the work of groups of Christian men and women university teachers, which have been drawn together at intervals jointly by the Christian Frontier Council and the Student Christian Movement. It has had a good press, and it will undoubtedly be widely read in the university world. It also ought to be read outside the universities for at least two reasons: one is that, whether we like it or not, we are rapidly moving to a situation in which a university training of some kind will be a requirement for a very large proportion of responsible positions in society. The State is forging head on a rapid—some would say disastrously rapid—expansion of the universities, both in numbers of students and in curriculum. The second reason is that it is in the university world that the confrontation which is everywhere going on between the Christian faith and thought and the Christian ethic on the one hand, and forms of thought and indeed of faith which are secular and derive mainly from the immense influence of science and technology on the other, finds its most conscious and deliberate expression.

The utmost confusion exists on the simple and fundamental question, what, in the modern world, a university exists for. For what purpose are students at a university at all? Is it in order to learn up a subject, pass an examination in it, and earn a living by using the knowledge acquired? Is it in order that the select few (whether they are chosen

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by right of birth or by examination) may enter on the cultural heritage of the past and have handed to them the keys to leadership in the life of a nation? Is it that they may share in the pursuit of knowledge and perhaps add something to its sum total? Is it in order that they may derive the advantages of corporate life, learning as much from each other as from their teachers, or is it that they may be under the pastoral care of the wise and learned and emerge with some shaped and stable view of human life and destiny? Or, finally, is the purpose of sending students to the university mainly social rather than individual, namely that society may be provided with persons equipped with the innumerable types of expertise necessary for keeping the machinery of a highly technical industrialized society ticking over? Some of these purposes war against others and who is to say which should triumph? It is all too clear that the immense demand of society for skills, especially in science and technology, the dependence of the universities on State financial aid and the economic necessity which drives many students to look on the university first and foremost as a place which should equip them to earn a living as the result of their studies, all point in the direction of a utilitarian conception of the university. The old ideals of Oxford and Cambridge, in which a pursuit of knowledge for its own sake was carried on in an atmosphere of freedom and leisure, culture and gentility, were cushioned by the immense wealth of a prosperous industrial community and by the lavish endowments of the past, and those who say that such high privilege for the few fails to meet the claims of the many can bring powerful arguments to bear. It is not only impossible, it would probably be undesirable, to attempt to turn the great modern universities into replicas of Oxford and Cambridge. Yet the longing for their past glory, even in its present residual form, still draws both students and dons to the older universities. Underneath the privilege was something very precious, something perhaps indispensable, to the true university.

Sir Walter's book sets all these problems not within the narrow field of administrative reform, but in the wider one

f society as a whole. If society at large does not know to what things it attaches supreme value, it cannot reform its universities. In all this change and confusion, what ought the Christian university teacher to do, both in relation to his students, to his subject and to his university or college? These questions were discussed at a large conference of university teachers called together by the Student Christian Movement and the Christian Frontier Council in January. Unquestionably, many of those who were at the conference saw in a new perspective some of the problems to which in daily life they live too close to obtain a broad and steady view. For some, the area of Christian responsibility was uncomfortably extended by what was said. If the book continues this process in a wider circle it will have accomplished the main aim of the Christian Frontier Council in undertaking the work. We have not undertaken in the News-Letter an extended review of the book : that has been competently performed elsewhere. Instead we have decided to ask M. B. Foster, who has recently left his place as tutor in Philosophy at Christ Church, Oxford, for a Chair in Cologne University, to draw out of the book two or three points to which further thought might profitably be given. In the space available to him Mr. Foster can, of course, do no more than outline his points.

Another undertaking to which the Frontier has given vigorous effort for three years is its medical group, to which Mr. Daniel Jenkins gave the major part of his time until he left the Frontier Council last summer in order to take up a Commonwealth Fellowship in the United States. This group consisted almost equally of Roman Catholics and non-Romans. There are a number of questions, such as abortion, birth-control and artificial insemination, which have medical, ethical and legal elements in them inextricably tied together on which Roman Catholics and other Christians are sharply divided. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, broadly speaking, non-Roman Christians feel that the Roman Catholic approach is legalistic and authoritarian with a dash of prejudice in it, while Roman Catholics regard their fellow Christians as lacking clearly defined principles and

therefore prone to be driven before the winds of popular opinion. A large degree of misunderstanding was swept away by the work of this group, and, while neither of the two religious elements in it capitulated to the other, a broad basis of understanding was arrived at. When such difficult questions as these are discussed in a vacuum as they frequently are by moral theologians, the differences are at their greatest. When a group of doctors sit down to discuss what they would actually do in half a dozen concrete cases, it is found that Christians would in 99 per cent of such cases agree in acting in a certain way. In action Christians would be nearer to each other than to the non-Christian. The main aim of this group was to produce a book, which is now in the press, on the Christian doctor's vocation in the conditions of medical practice which exist to-day. Slender as the book is, we believe that it is an attempt at a wholly new type of theological writing. The book was written by Daniel Jenkins, an able and imaginative theologian who already has several works in the theological field standing to his name. It is based on papers written by the medical members of the group, and every word of it was subjected to radical criticism by competent surgeons, physicians and medical psychologists. We believe this is the first time that a theologian has attempted the task of writing a theological work from within the context of a secular discipline, and hope that it may be the forerunner of a new type of theological writing for laymen based on a close integration of lay experience and theological knowledge.

A third Frontier book is on a subject familiar to News-Letter readers—the young person leaving school at the minimum age and going out to work in industry. The experience of post-war years has shown how little satisfaction a great industrial population finds or even expects in work, and how little Christians have to say on what is, after all, a universal and basic human experience. When the little book which Dr. Marjorie Reeves is writing, with the help of other members of the Frontier Council and out of an experience of drawing together both educators and those who are concerned within industry with the introduction of

young people to the working world, is finished and published, it will help to complement from the practical angle of lay experience the work being done under the auspices of the World Council of Churches on re-discovering a Christian doctrine of work.

THE ECUMENICAL SETTING OF THE FRONTIER

This short account is perhaps enough to indicate that the Frontier has work to do quite apart from the Christian News-Letter. How much it is able to do depends, of course, on factors which are at present wholly unknown. But what is unquestionable is that its major concern—that of helping Christian laymen and women to discover their Christian obedience in and through their lay vocation by a far more radical examination both of their vocation and their faith—is not unique to this one Council, but is to be found elsewhere. An interesting meeting, at which the editor of the C.N.L. was present, took place in April at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, outside Geneva, a house equipped by the World Council of Churches to be a place of meeting and study for Christians from many countries and religious traditions. For a week the officers and leaders of lay movements in Europe and the United States met together to exchange experience and to discuss some of their common problems. The particular forms which the movement among the laity has taken in different countries has been described in the News-Letter from time to time as the editor has been able to move about and visit them. It is a striking and a sobering thought that it is the Churches of Germany which out of their poverty have made the greatest provision for this work; not only have they their eight Evangelical Academies (see C.N.L. No. 324) where groups of laymen are being constantly gathered together, but with characteristic German thoroughness an attempt is being made to build up a centre where the Church may have ready access to the best secular study in a wide range of subjects. Thus, the Christian theologian or writer who wants to make some reference to economics or politics or education or some aspect of industry can be told what he ought to read and where he will find it and be put in touch with knowledgeable

men in these various fields who, as Christian laymen, are prepared to serve the Church in this way. Much, of course, depends on the use to which this information is put, and it would be easy to pile up vast files of documents which were never used or, if used, wrongly evaluated.

In France, what amounts to the counterpart of the Christian Frontier Council is known as the Association of Protestant Professional Groups, which sprang up after the war mainly in Paris and Bordeaux as the result of discussions among Christian politicians, economists and lawyers during the war. Their method of working is simple but very effective. Most of these professional groups meet in private houses, and none has any staff or equipment. They have spread from Paris into the industrial region of northern France, where there are many little groups holding regular meetings. An annual conference draws them together, and a basic theme of study is usually followed by all the groups. Last year they were all at work on the Christian layman's responsibilities for the use of his time; this year their subject is "Respect for Life", chosen because among all the various professions it is important in different ways: the industrialist's responsibility for his work people, the doctor's for his patients, the lawyer's for his clients, the educator's for his pupils, and so on. Many of these groups are characterized by a simple, sincere and apparently effective evangelistic motive: they succeed in drawing into their membership marginal Christians whose reaction is that if Christianity is about the sort of things which affect them in their everyday life, then they are interested in it.

To all these groups and movements, what the Frontier stands for and has accomplished is well known because they read the Christian News-Letter. But even when the News-Letter is gone, the bonds of a common purpose remain.

LETTER FROM TANGANYIKA

Readers of the News-Letter like to have news of one another from time to time. Here is part of a letter from a reader working in the Groundnuts Project at Kongwa.

"The place is frighteningly BIG, and nothing has any shape. It is like a tented Sheffield. It would take hours to sketch the background against which we work, and the tensions that increase and decrease like the pulse of an invalid, all the time. There is an air of general uncertainty. The thing people need is to feel that they are going to be allowed to get on with their job—so far we have been besieged by 'experts' who come out in a string, and return to the U.K. Sheafs of cyclostyled memos sit on all our desks waiting to be filed and out of the way before the next batch arrives. Then too there is a general feeling that we must have 'leadership' and are not getting it. In part this is due to the extreme disappointment that the natural hazards have proved so great. When people are struggling against these sorts of things they always tend to push the responsibility for the hazards on to the next bloke up the scale—and in part this has happened here. The thing that worries me most is the ethos of 'I couldn't care less' amongst the majority. Mostly it is the result of people suffering from broken promises ('they told me that my house would be ready for me, and here I am in a tent,' or, 'they said that my wife would be able to join me in May and now they say it will be November'), with the result that no one really believes what the next man says to him. But all these things are, I believe, part of the growing pains.

"We have only just begun to work with the Africans. Our first village school opened less than a month ago, in a marquee in the bush (no local building materials here) with about eight children (in a fortnight it was seventy!) and a good teacher, trained in the Mission over the hill. The first African villages are being built, and we have our village schools starting up all the time now. On our other forward area, several hundred miles up-country from here, we have a Church of Scotland man and his wife, both remarkable people, who were just leaving a grand piece of work in the Copper Mines in Rhodesia. They have started schools, community education, boy scouts, night school, etc. Local building materials are plentiful and they are building all their own schools and community centres with what lies to hand.

Here in Kongwa our little Wagogo arrive to work in the morning with spears and blankets, and their hair plastered with the red mud, and many of them can't speak Swahili. But we have, of course, a large collection of the skilled trades, and Africans come from all over the place to fill them. We have started an African Community Centre for these lads—lectures and classes in English on various subjects (they chose their own programme, amongst which came Agricultural Science, Economics, Political Science, Art, Music, etc.) from Europeans in Kongwa who are interested enough to give the lectures. About fifteen educated Africans run a sort of 'night school' for office boys, mess-boys, etc., every night, at which they learn English, arithmetic, and reading and writing for the illiterates. We have a shocking old tin hut as our lecture hall, the only lighting is from oil lamps, and there are no proper desks. But they pour in and are full of plans for the improvement of their premises and for the beginning of a library, etc., and a canteen later on. They are hungry for this sort of thing. I think the most interesting thing that has grown in the last two months is the European—African Forum. To this come fourteen Africans and fourteen Europeans, by invitation, to discuss once a month some question that has been mutually agreed. We have, as you can imagine in a thing the size of Ground-nuts, a lot of very talented and interesting people, both European and African, and this Forum must be the only thing of its kind in Tanganyika. We all take the gloves off with a vengeance, and last week had a very forthright discussion on 'Why are Africans and Europeans so often suspicious of each other?' This opened many windows for all of us on both sides. It is only a small group, but it is important. Also in Kongwa they have just begun the formation of things such as Domestic Councils, Works Councils, etc. So things are beginning to happen at last."

Kathleen Bliss

NOTES ON SOME IMPLICATIONS OF UNIVERSITY REFORM

By MICHAEL FOSTER

THE following reflections arise from Sir Walter Moberly's book, *The Crisis in the University*. They are an attempt to suggest some ways in which, if we accept his attitude, we may be led to modify our thinking.

PRESUPPOSITIONS "

One of the charges brought in the book against the modern university is that it bases itself on the impossible ideal of "pre-suppositionless thinking" (see Ch. 3, pp. 61-8). The details of his charge are : (a) the university bases itself upon the assumption that thinking can be wholly objective, i.e., that the influence of non-rational presuppositions can be wholly avoided ; (b) this is an impossible ideal ; (c) the attempt to achieve it results in self-deception—we can't free ourselves from our presuppositions, but we can succeed in ignoring them, and thus, so long as we persist in this attempt, they remain unscrutinized.

This point has been made in Arnold Nash's book, *The University in the Modern World*, and in other writings about the universities. It seems to me quite sound and very important. It is an application to the special case of the universities of the devastating criticism which Marx and Freud from different angles brought against current pretensions to objective knowledge in morals, politics, philosophy, and indeed in all spheres except those of mathematics and natural science. They showed that convictions which were believed to be rationally evident were really subject to the secret influence of subconscious factors, whether psychological or social.

But if it is vain to try to free ourselves from presuppositions, how can we pursue objective truth in these matters at all ? All conclusions seem equally involved in relativity.

The true method in the pursuit of truth, says Moberly, is "not that all presuppositions should be discarded, but that they

should be uncovered, clearly expressed and thoroughly scrutinized" (p. 64). "Once our presuppositions are brought into the open, they are relatively harmless" (p. 67).

I think that what Moberly says here too is true; but that it needs a lot of explaining how it can be so. Why is it that, when presuppositions are brought into the open, they are harmless? Is it because, when you have become aware of your presupposition, you can detach yourself from it and judge it in the light of an objectively apprehended truth? This seems to be the implication of what Moberly says in some passages, for he continues the passage last quoted as follows: "We can discount them" (i.e., our presuppositions once they are brought into the open) "ourselves and so can other people. Their influence can be checked by comparison with judgments on the same set of facts made by those who start from another initial bias than ours." This seems to imply that you can *after all*, if you will first go through the process of criticizing presuppositions, attain to a position in which they have been discarded. But then you are not being in earnest with the statement that presuppositions cannot be discarded.

If we insist on taking that statement seriously, how can we then say that presuppositions are relatively harmless once they are brought into the open? What good does it do to expose our presuppositions, if we cannot thereby discard them?

I suggest that this position implies a radically new theory of knowledge (for the familiar theories of knowledge are based on the assumption that knowledge is "presuppositionless"). We shall have to regard the processes of knowledge more on the analogy of the processes of faith. The exposure of our presuppositions would then be analogous to confession or repentance. The analogy with repentance is indeed suggested in a passage of Moberly's which adjoins that already quoted from p. 64: "What is essential to honest thinking is . . . that all presuppositions . . . should be uncovered. . . . In particular the emotional factors in our judgments should be revealed to ourselves and other people. 'We have to uncover our sub-articulate egoisms.'"

The analogy may suggest a way in which we may suppose the presuppositions to be made harmless without being discarded:

the confession of sins doesn't make us sinless, but gets us forgiveness, though we still remain sinful, so the confession of our presuppositions doesn't make us presuppositionless, but may enable these very presuppositions to become vehicles of truth.

Perhaps the analogy may be extended also to communication. As fellowship on a deeper level becomes possible between two men who have both confessed their sins, so perhaps two minds which have both uncovered their presuppositions in this way may be enabled thereby to meet at the level at which conversion is made.

No doubt faith, as well as confession, is required for the attainment of truth in this way, as it is for the forgiveness of sins. This involves a radical theologizing of the theory of knowledge. But I suspect that this is necessary anyway in the sphere previously claimed by philosophy. Certainly *untheological* theories of knowledge in this sphere are hard put to it to maintain themselves against the attacks of modern science.

FAITH AND SCIENCE

One problem is remarkable by its absence from Moberly's book. The book considers how a Christian's faith should affect his conduct in the discharge of his duties as a teacher and as a university administrator: but not how his faith should affect the conduct of his thought within his subject.

It may, of course, be maintained that his study of his subject should be autonomous. If this is so, then it can indeed be offered to God, as all activities can, and such offering will make a great difference to the spirit in which he pursues it (in humility, perhaps, and gratitude and tranquillity); but his faith will have no effect on the actual course of his thinking. The relation of his study to his religion will in that case be the same as that exemplified in Herbert's hymn: "Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws, makes that, and the action, fine." In this example, the offering to God transforms the spirit in which the work is done, but it does not affect the technique of the sweeping.

We may be inclined to adopt this view, especially when we are reacting from the extravagances of those (Nazi or Communist) who claim that the scientist's ideology should permeate his

science. But it is hard to maintain it universally of all university studies. Of philosophy at least it seems clear that it cannot be independent of the faith which its author holds ; and if our natural sciences contain or imply a theory of nature it might seem that the theory must be either compatible or incompatible with the doctrine of Christian faith, and that the Christian man of science is surely, therefore, challenged to bring the one body of truth into conformity with the other. This is the form in which the problem of "science and religion" presented itself to the men of the nineteenth century. If they, on the whole, declined the challenge, and developed their faith and their science independently of one another, surely, it may seem, this is only another example of the Christian schizophrenia ? Surely it is for us, in this department as in others, to break down the partition ? That means letting our faith direct not only our teaching and administration, but the course of our scientific investigations. Then, it seems, we shall be committed to the view that there is a "Christian" biology, physics, etc.

This conclusion, although he does not draw it, might appear to be a legitimate application of the general principle by which Moberly's book is inspired. I think he is right not to draw it, but that explanation is needed why it should not be drawn.

Is this the solution : that natural sciences are changing their nature and becoming techniques ? Up to the beginning of the modern period there was a single concept of scientific knowledge (called "philosophy") embracing both what we now call philosophy and what we now call science. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the division was made and sharpened between Science (= "positive science"), on the one hand, and Philosophy on the other. In spite of the schism, both were held to be bodies of truth. This is the conception which is still most readily familiar in the twentieth century, at least to non-scientists ; but perhaps in reality the schism has now developed still further. Perhaps natural science really is ceasing to be a theory and becoming a technique (a method of prediction and control, a "know how" instead of a "know that") ? In that case its relation to the faith of the scientist really would be like that of Herbert's room-sweeping to the faith of the sweeper. If science is not a theory, there can be no theoretical incompatibilities to remove.

To prove this suggestion would need more knowledge of physics than I have. It seems to me to be supported by a remark which I heard made recently by a German physicist, Professor H. Gege, who has given thought to the theory of physics, viz., at the virtue of the Christian scientist is like that of the Christian baker or bricklayer—to be a good husbandman of his technique. Above all, it seems to me significant and corroborative that conscientious scientists are no longer worried by the “conflict religion and science” in the terms in which it was conceived in the nineteenth century. What worries them (especially the cosmic scientists) is not whether their science commits them to a metaphysics incompatible with their faith, but whether the power which it confers will be employed for good ends.

If we accept this suggestion, what are we to say about the philosophical studies which stood on the other side of the schism? They are patently unable any longer to maintain themselves on a rational basis, and, if I am right, must be founded on a basis of faith, i.e., become theological.

Thus, it would appear that the old, embracing concept of “science” is disappearing and that the ground which it previously occupied will be divided between two types of study, the theological and the technical.

DIAGNOSIS AND PRESCRIPTION

The book lays down, I believe, most true and important principles which should guide the action of Christians in the present situation. The passages in which they are contained (especially pp. 25–8, 99–105, 263–78) seem to me to be those in which the book reaches its highest level of insight and value.

These do not amount to a programme. There are other portions of the book in which something more like a programme is aimed at; but there is no space to discuss these here. A conference of university teachers (“Dons’ Swanwick”) was held at Swanwick in January, 1949, for discussion of the book, which was then available in proof copies. From this there emerged very little in the form of agreed plan or prescription, beyond arrangements for further meetings by local groups in their own universities.

Perhaps there is no cause for disappointment in this. The notion of diagnosis and prescription in social matters is Greek rather than Christian. One diagnoses an evil in another, in which one is not oneself involved. One plans for another, not for oneself. The notion of planning involves a distinction between planner and subject, analogous to that between doctor and patient.

But in a Christian community, all are involved in the evils which they discern. The task is not a skilful removal of the mote in my neighbour's eye, but an acknowledgment of the beam in my own. It seems, therefore, that, for the Christian, the process of diagnosis and prescription should be replaced by one which may best be described as *confession*, in which all are equally under judgment.

If confession is followed by the gift of God's spirit, this will not be given in the form of a plan, which can be imposed upon some other body of men (in this case, upon the members of British universities who were not at the conference). But it will work as leaven, spreading from those who have received it to those in whose midst they are placed, and just as the operation of leaven depends upon its being in that which is to be leavened, and indistinguishable from it except by its effects, so the first call on the Christian don is to be in and of his university and deeply committed to it.

It would be wrong to depreciate the importance and the duty of hard and rigorous thinking ; but it would be wrong also to think of this conference simply as a planning conference, or to look in Moberly's book for a "Christian plan" for the university. The significance of the conference lies in what it was, rather than in what it planned—a contact of minds in an openness to God and to each other. The conference and the book will fulfil their purpose if they stimulate this process. Perhaps a loaf is a better firstfruit than a recipe.

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